



Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

UNAIDS

UNICEF • UNDP • UNFPA • UNDCP
ILO • UNESCO • WHO • WORLD BANK

Fact Sheet 2002

World AIDS Campaign 2002–2003 **HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination**

Stigma and discrimination rank among the major obstacles to effective HIV/AIDS prevention and care. The success of a response to the AIDS epidemic depends on whether these barriers are overcome. With its focus on stigma and discrimination, the World AIDS Campaign 2002–2003 aims to help people achieve effective HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support—hence its slogan ‘Live and Let Live’.

Putting AIDS on the agenda

- The World Health Organization (WHO), supported by the United Nations General Assembly, declared 1 December as World AIDS Day in 1988. With the creation of UNAIDS in 1996, World AIDS Day was remodelled as a Campaign to build on the momentum created by the international day, and to encourage more concerted and sustained responses to the epidemic.
- Since then, international mobilization around World AIDS Day has grown steadily. Awareness-raising activities now take place worldwide, with many countries extending their activities to sustained, year-long attention to the selected issue.
- The World AIDS Campaign tackles cutting edge issues, such as Children, Young People and AIDS (1997–1999) and Men and AIDS (2000–2001). These thematic areas are chosen by UNAIDS and its Cosponsors, in consultation with other UN organizations, governments and civil society.
- With its focus on stigma and discrimination, the 2002–2003 World AIDS Campaign is aimed at helping prevent, reduce or eliminate stigma and discrimination by supporting effective international, regional and national strategies. The Campaign will also tackle wider existing social inequalities—especially those of gender, sexual orientation and race.

Stigma, discrimination and human rights

- Stigma harms. It can lead to feelings of shame, depression, withdrawal, worthlessness and guilt. It silences individuals and communities, saps their strength and increases their vulnerability. It isolates people and deprives them of care and support, thereby worsening the impact of infection.
- HIV/AIDS-related stigma devalues persons living with, or who are presumed to be living with, HIV/AIDS, as well as the individuals, groups and communities with which they are associated.
- Stigma derives from the association of HIV/AIDS with sex, disease and death, and with behaviours that may be illegal, forbidden or taboo, such as pre- and extra-marital sex, sex work, sex between men and injecting drug use. HIV/AIDS-related stigma also builds upon, and reinforces, existing prejudices.
- HIV-related discrimination refers to actions that result from stigma. Discrimination occurs when a distinction is made against a person because of his or her (actual or presumed) HIV status, or because the person is seen to belong to a particular group (for example, sex workers, men who have sex with men or injecting drug users). Such actions result in the person being treated unfairly and unjustly.

- Freedom from discrimination is a fundamental human right that is confirmed in the core international human rights instruments. Freedom from discrimination is essential for the realization of other rights. Thus, discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS, or those presumed to be infected, is a clear violation of their human rights.
- Stigma, discrimination and human rights violations combine to form a vicious circle: they create, legitimize and reinforce each other.

The toll it takes

- Fear of discrimination may prevent people from seeking treatment for AIDS or from disclosing their HIV status openly. People living with HIV or who are suspected of being HIV-positive are often turned away from health-care services, denied housing and employment, shunned by their friends and colleagues, divorced by their spouses, assaulted and abused, denied insurance coverage or refused entry into foreign countries.
- The forms of stigma and discrimination faced by people with HIV/AIDS are multiple and complex, with the burden on women being especially heavy. UNAIDS-sponsored research in India and Uganda shows women with HIV/AIDS are doubly stigmatized—as ‘people living with HIV/AIDS’ and as ‘women’.
- Injecting drug users, men who have sex with men, and sex workers are stigmatized and discriminated against as they are often presumed to be infected and are blamed for infecting others.
- The stigma and discrimination caused by HIV/AIDS also affects the next generation. Children who are struggling to cope with the deaths of parents from AIDS carry the

additional burden of having to come to terms with HIV-related stigma and discrimination.

- HIV/AIDS-related stigmatization, discrimination and human rights abuses are not just committed by individuals. They can be committed by governments, private organizations and institutions, as well as communities and families.

Dealing with stigma and discrimination

- Given the intimate link between HIV/AIDS-related stigma, discrimination and human rights violations, *multi-pronged interventions* are needed. Thus, action must be taken to *prevent* stigma and *challenge* discrimination when it occurs, and *monitor and redress* human rights violations.
- The Declaration of Commitment (endorsed at the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS in June 2001) calls on States, by the year 2003, to enact, strengthen or enforce legislation, regulations and other measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS and members of vulnerable groups. It also calls on States to take steps that ensure those groups enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to develop strategies to combat the stigma and social exclusion connected with the epidemic.
- The 2002–2003 World AIDS Campaign will encourage leaders at all levels, and in all walks of life, to visibly challenge HIV-related discrimination, spearhead public action and act against the many other forms of discrimination that people face in relation to HIV/AIDS. Also key is the active involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS in the response to the epidemic, and in ensuring that prevention, treatment and support services are accessible to all.